



Haul, Parody, Remix: Mobilizing Feminist Rhetorical Criticism With Video

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Abstract

Video composing can subvert, or critically remix, the power dynamics of mainstream popular culture as well as facilitate students' desires to write against sexism and enact intersectional feminist identities. We feature six video projects created for a fall 2015 undergraduate class on the analysis of popular culture. As models, these videos encourage writing and rhetoric instructors to invite students to communicate their own intersectional identities and values through multimodal assignments. Doing so remixes the possibilities for how and where students' ideas can take shape. Organized into the two thematic categories of 1. media misrepresentation and rape culture and 2. anticapitalist criticism and feminist parody, this article shows how students' videos that adapt such genres as the consumerism-based haul video and musical video parody mobilize feminist rhetorical criticism.

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It's the patriarchy/and it'll never set you free (Russell, 2015).

Feminists must create their own audiences and involve them in technology by developing projects in all forms of new media, while continuing to monitor and critique cultural images of gender (Hocks, 1999, p. 111).

This article locates itself at the intersections of remix, feminist digital pedagogy, and undergraduate research. We argue here that video composing can subvert, or critically remix, the power dynamics of mainstream popular culture as well as facilitate students' desires to write against sexism and enact intersectional feminist identities. Our argument is based on video projects created for a class on the analysis of popular culture.

In "Remembering Sappho" (2011) Jessica Enoch and Jordynn Jack feature ways students can revise and expand the rhetorical tradition, including students' digital projects like blogs and websites that amplify the perspectives of southern women who are largely unknown to the public. Laurie Grobman and Joyce Kinkead (2010) open *Undergraduate Research in English Studies* by describing all the benefits yielded by undergraduate research, including enabling students to "contribute their voices to creating knowledge" (ix). While contributors to their book showcase a variety of types of undergraduate research, none feature digital projects. Jane Greer (2009) argues that including girls in feminist

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rhetoric is a form of feminist academic activism and “raise[s] new questions about why and how women find themselves facing both lost opportunities and new possibilities for rhetorical performance as they enter adulthood” (2). Motivated by both the historiographic mission of feminist rhetoric to broaden understanding and inclusion of women’s rhetorical practices, such as southern women and young women, as well as feminist digital rhetoric scholars who elicit calls such as Hocks’s invitation in the epigraph, we position these remix videos as expanding opportunities for undergraduate research and the production of feminist digital rhetoric, mobilizing students’ own feminist criticism with the video platform.

These video projects, from two sections of a course taught by Abby M. Dubisar, are organized into two themes. The first theme—media misrepresentation and rape culture—features Claire Lattimer, Jessica Thomas, and Makayla McGrew’s videos that look at how mainstream media perpetuate the blaming of victims and the normalization of gendered violence as well as how print media homogenize identity and beauty standards. The second theme—anticapitalist criticism and feminist parody—showcases Rahemma Mayfield, Joanne Myers, and Bethany Russell’s videos analyzing how infrastructures of power such as tax legislation, corporations, and popular music lyrics all define gender roles that disempower consumers and fans.

All six videos demonstrate the ways that multimodal composing can be a rich practice for feminist rhetorical criticism. After briefly reviewing literature on remix, feminist digital pedagogy, and co-authoring with students, we present the assignment and its parameters. Then we address the context of the course and assignment before featuring the students’ own descriptions of their work.

1. Categorizing Remix and Harnessing Popular Culture’s Genres

As scholars continue to discuss, remix can be a powerful rhetorical tool (Craig, 2015; Goldstein, 2015; Hafner, 2015). Most recently, Dustin Edwards (2016) has organized his typology of remixes into four categories: assemblage, appropriation, redistribution, and genre play. Subversive, feminist examples of remix and landmark feminist theory served as a backdrop to Edwards’s categorizing scheme (e.g., p. 47–50). He draws on critical perspectives without positioning them as wholly essential to understanding remix’s rhetorical possibilities, a choice more brightly illuminated by the videos made by Claire Lattimer, Jessica Thomas, Makayla McGrew, Rahemma Mayfield, Joanne Myers, and Bethany Russell. Instead of fitting tidily into a grid with clear columns, rows, and boundaries, remixes shape themselves into a growing and ever-expanding rhizome (Hagood, 2004) that shifts and changes as video composers use remix to launch critique.

While scholars such as Edwards (2016) have attended to remix and video’s rhetorical possibilities (Carter & Arroyo, 2011; Jackson & Wallin, 2009; Palmeri, 2012; Turk and Johnson, 2012; VanKooten & Berkley, 2016; Williams, 2014), rhetoric and writing researchers have not yet positioned remix and video making as platforms for feminist rhetorical critique. We are inspired to offer students opportunities to communicate their gendered and feminist identities by Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes’s (2016) insistence that “[sexuality] is simultaneously one of the dominant filters for and zones of conflict through which we understand, negotiate, and argue through our individuality and our collectivity” (p. 1). Popular culture intersects with such identity negotiation, in that popular culture has influenced the sexual and gendered identities of many of us.

Similarly, Abby, as the instructor, wants to write about these projects with students because we all want them to play a more central role in theorizing feminist digital pedagogy. Scholars may use student samples or descriptions of student work in their publications but do not frequently theorize students’ work with the students themselves (Adams, 2014; Briggs, 2014; Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010; Halbritter, 2011). We find parallels between what we have learned from one another and the close relationship between “performance and current college literacies” that Jenn Fishman, Andrea Lunsford, Beth McGregor, and Mark Otuteye (2005, p. 226) noted as they published together as instructors and students. Doing so is a feminist issue. For example, although Jared Colton (2016) advocates a feminist ethic of care in his “heuristic of vulnerability” (p. 20), and he smartly has students in his courses reflect on their remix choices as caring or wounding, readers gain students’ perspectives only from his brief descriptions as their teacher. We begin to address this gap here and call for more student perspectives and applications of feminist frameworks “explicitly challenging systems of power and the norms of traditional scholarship” (Almjeld et al., 2016).

By subverting the tradition of professors writing about students, this article is a remix of the research article. We hope that writing and rhetoric instructors and their students see it as an invitation to engage feminist rhetorical criticism, perhaps as one in a variety of critical perspectives, in their multimodal assignments. As a multivocal, multiauthored

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